

Seeing God's Hand in Hardship, Part 4 - Acts 28:5-6 – October 17th, 2010

- This is part four of a series titled; "Seeing God's Hand in Hardship," and that's exactly what we see here in the Apostle Paul's hardship.
- The beloved Apostle has been shipwrecked again, and this time finds himself on the Island of Malta, as a prisoner on his way to Rome.
- Now, as we've just read in the beginning verses of this chapter, the hardship and difficulty doesn't seem to end once they reached land.

- It's for this reason that I believe the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record, with careful detail, the difficulty they continued to encounter.
- In other words, it's because God wants us to see His mighty hand in the midst of the hardship and difficulty of life's shipwrecks.
- We saw the first one in verse one, where, after swimming to shore and clinging to life in the midst of this storm, they finally reach land.

1. Refuge (Verse 1)

- Here, we saw that God's hand came by way of refuge as they land on the island of Malta, (Refuge), which they didn't recognize at first.
- There are those times when God moves His mighty hand on our behalf, bringing us to our Malta in order to provide us a place of refuge.

2. Kindness (Verse 2)

- The second way that we can see God's hand in our hardship was in verse two. It's when we're the recipients of "unusual kindness."
- Were told that it's cold and raining, so the Barbarians show unusual kindness by building a fire for them, and are welcoming to them.

3. Strength (Verse 3a)

- The third way that we can discover God's hand in our hardship was found in the first part of verse three; it's His supernatural strength.
- Even though Paul is as tired and exhausted as everyone else, he has the strength to gather a pile of brushwood and put it on the fire.

4. Opportunity (Verse 3b)

- That brought us to the fourth way we discover God's hand in our hardship. It comes in the form of a divinely appointed opportunity.
- The opportunity is presented vis-à-vis a snake that's driven out from the heat of the fire then fastens itself on the Apostle Paul's hand.

5. Tragedy (Verse 4)

- In verse four we looked at the fifth way God's hand may be seen in our hardship and how it can come when a tragedy strikes us.
- After the locals see the snake striking Paul, they say the goddess Justice hasn't let him escape because he must be a murderer.

6. Influence (Verses 5-6)

5 But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. 6 The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

- The sixth way we see the hand of God in our hardship is in the influence we can have on others when they see how tragedy affects us.
- v5 Paul simply shakes the snake off his hand and into the fire, and then we're told that he didn't suffer any ill effects from the venom.
- v6 They expect him to die instantly but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen they change their minds about him.

- Here's what I'm thinking: when tragedy strikes our response will either be that of being an influence, or that of being the one influenced.
- The locals on our Island of Malta, or Oahu if you prefer, are watching how tragedy affects us, and our influence can change their minds.

- I would suggest that just as they changed their minds and thought he was a god, so too will others change their minds about our God.
- So what was it that changed their minds? It was when "after waiting a long time" they saw that nothing unusual happened to him.
- They had never seen this before. All of their friends and loved ones had died at the hand of these poisonous snake bites, but not Paul.

- Now, on the other side of this, there was the potential for Paul, instead of being an influence being influenced instead by what they said.
- They believe the gods are judging him because of the snake bite, then, believe he is a god because he's not affected by the snake bite.

"Paul remained unmoved amid the changes of human judgment. Though to men he was a murderer one moment and a god the next, in patience he possessed his soul, unmoved in holy faith. We must not allow the opinions of men to affect our minds, or we shall be changing as the wind."

Charles Spurgeon

"People are interesting. We always think the worst. When the snake strikes, invariably we start to think, Oh, my. You must be a bad person or else that snake wouldn't be hanging from your hand. Isn't this human nature? First, the islanders thought Paul was a murderer. Then, just as quickly, they thought he was a god. If you're seeking the adulation of people—good luck! They'll put you down just as quickly as they'll build you up."

Jon Coursen